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UFO Group Pursues Interest In The Strange

By Charlotte Grimes
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

What do a housewife, a surgical assistant, a map maker, a retired autoworker and a Lutheran clergyman have in common?

Would you believe . . . UFOs?

Not that any of the five, or the 50 others, who gathered at the Farm and Home Savings Building at 110 West Lockwood Avenue in Webster Groves on Sunday expected an unidentified flying object to materialize out of a crystal-clear sky. Some — in decidedly unexpected circumstances — say they have already had that experience.

Rather, they are pursuing a personal fascination with the strange, often hoping for explanations as to how it came into their lives.

Their communal attempt at that is called the UFO Study Group of Greater St. Louis Inc.

"We have members as young as 14 and two who are in their 70s," explained John Schroeder, chairman of the 14-year-old group and a Lutheran clergyman. "As far as education, most have college degrees and many have a background in the sciences."

He chuckled and added: "Some come to the meetings just because they like a good story."

He said the group has about 80 dues-paying members but that as many as 200 people might show up for its lectures, Schroeder said. Among them, good stories are not rare. And despite the official name, the stories don't always have anything to do with UFOs and visitors from space.

Anything will do — the strange, the unexplainable, the fascinating and perhaps the frightening. The Loch Ness monster or dinosaurs in Africa, say.

The featured attraction Sunday was Bigfoot — alias "Sasquatch" — North American cousin to the Abominable Snowman of the Himalaya Mountains.

But the lure only wears different skins.

"It's a very deep, personal thing,"

said Jeff Kretsch, by day a cartographer with the U.S. Defense Mapping Agency, by night an investigator into UFO sightings for the group. He likes to balance fact against wishful thinking.

"People want to believe in it," he said. "Sometimes when I'm investigating and can show that there was a natural explanation, the people lose interest. But others, well, they find it exciting and it becomes kind of a hobby for them."

Long before Steven Spielberg, close encounters were *de rigueur* for the group's members.

Schroeder had his encounter as a 17-year-old in 1941. He recalled that he and his 16-year-old brother had watched a 30-foot shape hover above a house, its skin a burnished metal and its portholes alternately flashing lights of lavender and orange.

"I've been looking for others who saw it ever since," he said.

Frank M. Brown, a retired General Motors Corp. worker, was snickered at by his co-workers and dubbed "The UFO Man" for his fascination that began with a sighting when he was 12. But he takes it seriously indeed.

He reads constantly in scientific and popular journals and hopes that someday, he'll get a chance to "walk right up to one." He advertises his interest with a highly personalized license plate. Under light-reflecting letters that spell out "Did", is the question "U C A UFO." He wants those who have to call him.

Gayle and Phil O'Brien, both 35, aren't quite so dedicated. But they know the feelings for UFOs well. Gayle, a housewife, saw unaccountable lights in a night sky not long after Phil, a surgical assistant at a hospital, had his car chased by a UFO, they say.

"It's scary and intriguing," Mrs. O'Brien said. "When you see strange things flying in the sky, you'd like to know why."

, Sunday, January 30, 1983

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UFO search continues

The search continued Saturday for an unidentified object which fell from the sky Friday, striking the top of a vehicle which was traveling on U.S. 70 near Center School Road.

Cannon Air Force Base officials reported that a search was still underway to locate the object. It was confirmed that the object, which left a scratch and splattered grease on the vehicle of Mr. and Mrs. Russell Reed, had not fallen from the jet fighters which were flying overhead at the time of the incident.

Captain Martin Compton of Cannon reported that all F-111Ds had been thoroughly inspected and everything was in tact.

He said base personnel will continue searching for the object, although they do not believe it is government property.

The Reeds, who were passing through Clovis, said the object which hit their vehicle shortly before noon Friday was about six inches wide and several feet long.

When Reed saw the object falling he first thought it was a big black bird.

The couple looked for the object after realizing it had damaged their car. When they could not find it, they drove to a convenience store and called the New Mexico State Police.

CR: Jim George

On Halloween night in 1938, Orson Welles put on an adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. Although there was a preliminary announcement that the subsequent broadcast was fictional, the news-type account of Martians landing in New Jersey had Americans from Maine to Georgia running in the streets in fright.

The publicity was such that Welles was invited to Hollywood to direct motion pictures.

INFORMATION, DATA, COMMENTARY AND SPECULATION

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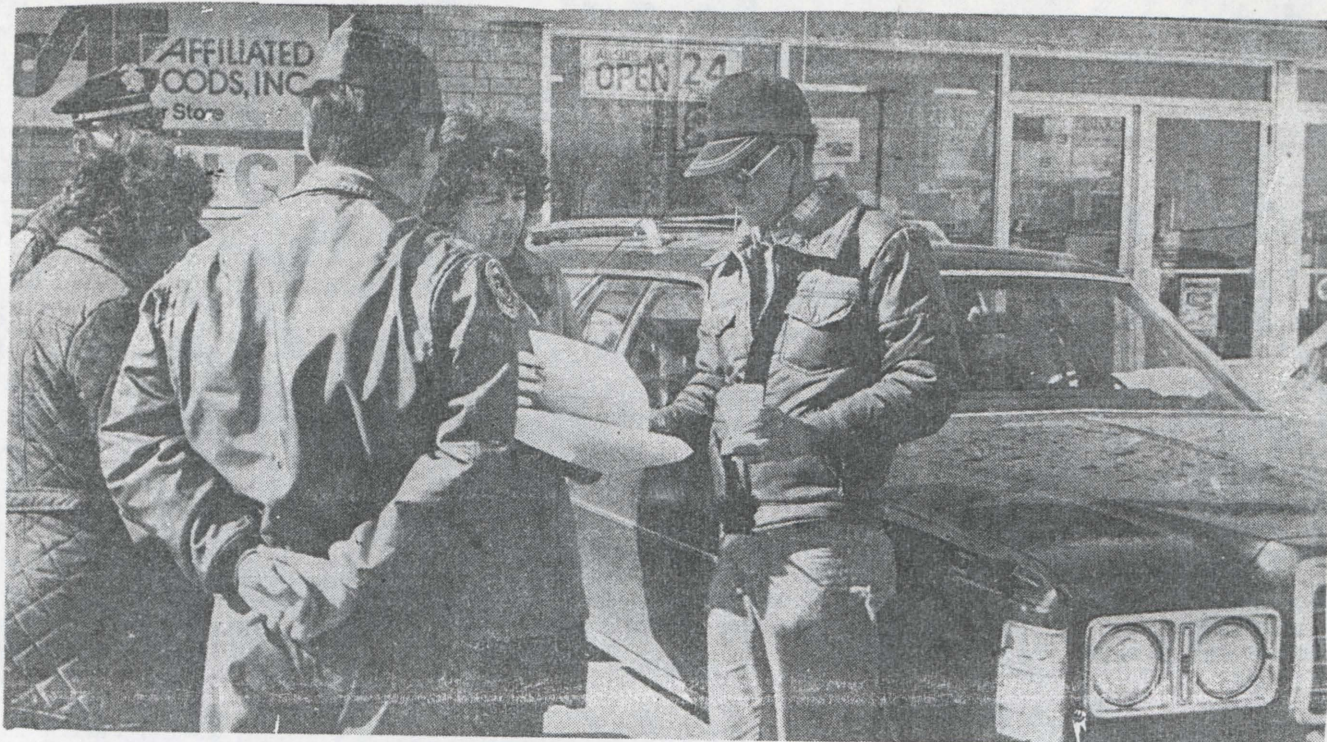
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(News-Journal Photo)

FALLEN OBJECT — Charlotte Farkas (center) of Cannon Air Force Base's legal office explains to Russell Reed what procedures will be taken if it is determined that an object which struck

Reed's vehicle is CAFB property. Reed's car was scratched when an object fell from the sky today, Reed said.

Unidentified object hits tourist's auto

The car of an Illinois couple was struck by an unidentified object that fell from the sky today, scratching the top of the station wagon and splattering it with grease.

The couple, Mr. and Mrs. Russell Reed of Danville, was driving on U.S. 70 near Center School Road when the object struck their car shortly before noon.

"I thought we had a blow out. It sounded like an explosion," said Mrs. Reed.

Her husband said he saw the object falling before it struck the car but he thought it was a big black bird at first.

However, Reed later concluded it may have been something that fell from a plane because he had seen several jets flying overhead prior to the incident.

The object was about six inches wide

and several feet long, according to Reed.

The couple looked for the object after they realized it had damaged their car. When they could not find it, they drove to a convenience store and called the New Mexico State Police.

State Police Officer Allan Collier and three Cannon Air Force Base personnel, Security Officer Sammy McClendon, Pilot Dave Mitchell and Legal Officer Charlotte Farkas, were searching for the object at presstime today.

"I'm glad nobody was hurt. It was a good thing the object didn't hit the windshield," Mitchell commented.

Mitchell said he would probably be able to determine if the object had fallen

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Object . . .

from an aircraft when it is found.

"It could be part of the landing gear on a plane that hasn't landed. That is why I came to see if I could identify it," he said.

Reed said he felt certain the object fell from a plane because "there wasn't anything else around it could have been. There were no cans, bottles, rubber or anything like that on the road and there weren't any other cars or people

around."

The couple were delayed for approximately one hour. However, they left Clovis before the object was found. Mrs. Farkas gave them some insurance forms and told them they would be contacted when the object was found and its origin determined.

The couple was traveling from Santa Cruz, Calif., to their home in Illinois.

NEWS, Longview, WA - Feb. 4, 1983

What was that thing?

By Jay McIntosh
The Daily News

Bob and Janet Farmer had a bright encounter of the low-flying kind Thursday night as a skyborne object bathed their house in light.

Bob Farmer was watching television at about 10:45 when he noticed something outside his front room window. An oblong object was quietly flying toward their Holcomb Acres home.

"If it was a big airplane it was flying way too low," Mrs. Farmer said.

"All of a sudden," Bob Farmer recalls, "there's just this great big bright light, like a great big floodlight. I told the wife, come here, look at this, and we looked out the window."

They walked out on the porch and the flying object, still quiet, seemed to stop. The light shone straight at their front yard. Mrs. Farmer went inside to call the Kelso police and the light went off.

"It didn't go out like you shut off a light switch, it just sort of faded," Farmer said. "It left an orange halo around where it was."

Had E.T. come back for a visit? Probably not, Jerry Zebor said this morning.

"I get a lot of those calls," said Zebor, general manager of Davis Air Service in Kelso. He said the UFOs turn out to be airplanes or helicopters flying along Interstate 5, a main air route between Seattle and Portland. Those aircraft often use their landing floodlights as beacons, he said.

"If they see another aircraft in the distance somewhere, they flick (the lights) on and off," Zebor said. That's probably what happened in the Farmers' case, he said after hearing a description.

Bob Farmer is still wondering about the encounter, however.

"The thing that got us was that it was so quiet, flying that low," he said.

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